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**Students 'GEAR UP' for college through summer institute at UW**

SEATTLE -- About 1,000 seventh- through 12<sup>th</sup>-grade students will spend a week on the University of Washington campus Aug. 14-18 as part of an innovative program to increase the number of low-income students who go to college. Students from Aberdeen, Hoquiam, Elma, Inchelium, Lakewood, Renton, Pasco, Tacoma, Spokane, Wapato and Yakima will be attending the summer institute.

The summer institute is a key component of GEAR UP (Gaining Early Awareness and Readiness for Undergraduate Programs), a federally-funded initiative that is reaching out to all corners of the state, creating partnerships among higher education, K-12 schools, state government, community organizations and the business community. The state of Washington has received a five-year, \$15.6 million grant under the program, which is jointly administered by the office of the governor, the Higher Education Coordinating Board and the UW. There also are four local GEAR UP partnerships serving students in the state.

The students coming to the UW will stay in residence halls and attend courses designed to introduce them to a college atmosphere. Students will select a "major" before coming to campus and will enroll in a series of courses that respond to their interests. They will attend a college fair and have an opportunity to tour other postsecondary schools in the Seattle area.

Students also will participate in job shadowing on the UW campus and at local businesses. The week's events will end with "graduation" ceremonies at noon at Meany Hall, at which UW President Richard L. McCormick will preside.

"The GEAR UP summer institute can help create real, lasting change in the lives of those it touches," said Gov. Gary Locke. "By exposing students to the college experience, we're building their hopes and dreams and showing them the opportunities that await them with a college education."

"GEAR UP provides important opportunities to inspire young people and show them that a college education is achievable," said McCormick. "Whether it happens at a place like the University of Washington or at another college or university, the important message is 'you belong here and there is a clear path for you to get here.'"

The national GEAR UP program was created to address the barriers that students from low-income families face in preparing for higher education. Nationally, just 47 percent of low-income high school students enroll in college or a trade school, compared with 82 percent from high-income families. Moreover, 22 percent of college-qualified high school students from low-income families don't pursue higher education—compared with just 4 percent from high-income families, according to the National Center for Education Statistics.

Reaching young people early with the message that college is possible is essential for change, according to HECB Executive Director Marc Gaspard. "We want students to understand that if they plan ahead and work hard they can go to college."

The approach of GEAR UP is to reach students early beginning in the seventh grade - and to make sure that they have access to the right preparatory courses for college. The program emphasizes mentoring throughout the school years, educational transformation in K-12 schools and college scholarships. The program pairs public schools, which have a high proportion of low-income students, with universities and community colleges, as well as community organizations and local businesses.

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